

## Mary, Did You Know?

1. Warm-up question: How was your Christmas?
  
2. On Sunday, we looked at the broad sweep of Mary's life, reminding ourselves that as a young mother she embraced the then typical Jewish theological view of the Messiah as someone who would be a great political and military leader, defeat the Romans, and usher in an age of unparalleled peace and prosperity for Israel. But just 8 days after Jesus' birth, the prophet Simeon challenged Mary's triumphant Messianic understanding, warning her that both she and her son would face great suffering. Imagine Mary's surprise – and consternation – when her son eventually launched his ministry and began saying things like “All who take up the sword will perish by the sword” (Mt. 26:52) and “My kingdom is not of this world” (Jn. 8:36) and “If a Roman soldier forces you to go one mile, go also the second” (Mt. 5:41) and “Love your enemies” (Mt. 44). Eventually Mary decided Jesus was on the wrong course and tried to “restrain” him (Mk. 3:21). In reply, Jesus announced that his real family was his followers, not his mother, brothers, and sisters (Mk. 3:32). The rift ran deep, and Mary disappeared from Jesus' story until the very end when she witnesses his death (Jn. 19:25) and then turned up among the believers after his resurrection (Acts 1:14). Now Mary finally understood her son's true purpose and mission.
  - a. Let's re-read Simeon's warning to Mary, as found in Luke 2 and printed on p. 3. Given Mary's initial breezy view of what her son's life would be like, how do you think Simeon's words of warning about opposition and suffering affected her?
  - b. Does it surprise you that Mary's relationship with Jesus almost broke? How do you feel about that? Do you think less of her?
  - c. As Mark 3 makes clear, there came a point when Mary thought her son was on the wrong course and disliked what he was doing, only to later do a complete 180 and embrace his vision and mission. When in your life have you been very wrong in your assessment of someone? What ultimately caused your view of them to shift?
  
3. Jeff asked us to consider what it was about Mary that enabled her to come to see that her initial aspirations for her son were flawed and that she needed to embrace a profoundly different understanding of his mission. The answer is found in Luke 2:19. “Mary kept all these words [spoken about Jesus] and **pondered** them in her heart.” Later, after her first big conflict with Jesus, when Jesus challenged her to try to better understand his sense of calling, we're once again told that “[Mary] kept all these things in her heart.” Lk. 2:51. In other words, instead of reflexively refusing to consider challenging ideas about her son, she took them into her heart and “pondered” them. The Greek word translated “pondered” is *sumballo*, which means “thrown together,” as in uncomfortable ideas or experiences that get thrown together. Instead of rejecting these ideas, Mary was able to sit with them, mull them over, and open herself to new and deeper understanding. This ability to “ponder” was critical to Mary's ability to live into the fullness of God's plan for her. The same is true for us.

- a. We all have different personalities. Some of us are more reflective; others of us are more reactive. Where would you place yourself on the following scale?
- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_\_\_ 8 \_\_\_\_\_ 9 \_\_\_\_\_ 10  
 Very reactive \_\_\_\_\_ A Mix of Both \_\_\_\_\_ Very reflective
- b. Why is it important to be able to ponder and process uncomfortable information and experiences? How would you explain the importance to someone?
- c. How can we get better at pondering? What are some practical tips?
4. The ability to ponder is especially important to our theological development. The word “theology” refers to our understanding of God and faith. In Mary’s case, her understanding of Messianic theology had to undergo a radical transformation.
- a. How has your theology evolved over time? When was the last time something changed in your theology? Should we be concerned if our theology is stagnant?
- b. It’s important that we’re not afraid to ask hard questions. Jeff shared the example of Pastor Paul in the play “The Christians.” There Paul wrestles with the typical Christian theological idea that a boy who gave his life to save his sister from a fire would nevertheless end up in hell because he didn’t self-identify as a Christian. Did it make you uncomfortable to hear Pastor Paul boldly questioning this typical theological idea about who goes to hell? Why or why not?
- c. Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father in heaven.” Mt. 7:21. Jeff said, “Maybe that boy in Paul’s story was much more of a follower of Jesus than many people who claim the name of Jesus and know all the ‘correct’ doctrinal answers, but would never give their life for someone else. After all, by giving his life to save someone, that boy was *literally* doing what Jesus did. So what does it really mean to ‘know’ Jesus?” Your thoughts?
- d. In your life right now, what’s your biggest unresolved theological question?
5. The ability to “ponder” is also critically important to our ability to experience personal growth. Jeff shared an example of a time he received tough criticism from a congregant that was hard to hear.
- a. Tell us about a time you received tough criticism from someone. How did you feel? How did you respond?
- b. We all have weaknesses and growing edges. Why is it so hard to face our stuff?
- c. As we move into the New Year, what’s a personal growth edge you feel God is calling you to focus on? How’s it going?

## **Luke 2:21-22 and 25-35**

21 After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

22 When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, his parents brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.

25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. <sup>26</sup>It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. <sup>27</sup>Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, <sup>28</sup>Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

<sup>29</sup> 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

<sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

33 And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup>Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed <sup>35</sup>so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'